

FORGIVENESS BEYOND IMAGINATION
JOHN 13:31-38

INTRODUCTION:

- A. *Before he became a Christian, Bob played professional hockey in Canada. He was tough, loved to fight and found himself in jail one night after a barroom brawl. Later, Bob and his wife became Christians and joined to staff of a Christian organization in the US.*

Bon had to apply for landed immigrant status which would allow him and his wife to continue in ministry in the United States. But because he had a criminal record, his request was denied. Fortunately for the Sheffields, their daughter had been born in the U.S., and this worked in their favor. This loophole allowed them to receive the visa they needed to continue their work in the United States.

It was a troubling experience for the Sheffields. Bob realized that they would have this same problem every time The Navigators assigned them to a new ministry in another country.... [T]hey decided to apply in Canada for what is called the "Queen's Pardon." A thorough investigation was conducted. The pardon was granted. Bob Sheffield received the following notice in the mail:

Whereas we have since been implored of he said Robert Jones Sheffield to extend a pardon to him in respect to the convictions against him, and whereas the solicitor general here submitted a report to us, now know ye therefore, having taken these things into consideration, that we are willing to extend royal clemency on him, the said Robert J. Sheffield, we have pardoned, remitted, and released him of and from the said convictions, and of and from all and every penalty to which he was liable in pursuance thereof.

...When his fingerprints go to the Canadian Mounted Police and they run them through their computer, the printout comes back reading, "No record." (Tom Eisenman, Temptations Men face, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1990, 21-22)

- B. **John 13:31**, *When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him.
32 If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.
33 "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.
34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.
35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."
36 Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied, "Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."
37 Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you."
38 Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!*
- C. This brief conversation sets the stage for one of the most powerful stories of forgiveness in all of human history. It is a story of forgiveness beyond imagination.
- D. Let's not just read the story vicariously, like a John Grisholm novel. Let's crawl in the pages and make it up close and personal... Like, let me ask you this...

I. WHAT'S THE WORST THING YOU HAVE EVER DONE?

- A. Sins Against People
1. Does God care about my sins against other people? Why should he care? It doesn't hurt him! Or does it? When Saul hurt Christians, Jesus said it was Jesus that Peter was persecuting. [Acts 9:4-5]
- It's because God so loves people.
 - God has placed himself in the role of advocate for the weak and innocent. God again and again judged Israel for their unjust treatment of the poor, the widows and the orphans. **They ALL forsook him and fled.**

2. Peter really let others down. He was the acknowledged and Jesus-picked leader of the band. And he has denied them all. When Peter denied knowledge of Christ, he denied his relationship with his brothers as well.
3. Peter had a discouraging influence on the others. Just when they needed a rallying call to courage, he left them to their own devices. The troops scattered because they had no general.
 - Look at his influence even weeks later—*I go afishing*. [KJV] And others decided to go fishing also. This is about having a back-up career; a fall-back position.
 - **John 21:1** *Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way:
2 Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.
3 "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.
[14 This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.]*
4. Think of the servant girl. What if she heard Peter preach some time later? What would she think? Could it be that she would dismiss anything he said as hypocrisy? Peter was guilty of the sin of causing someone to stumble spiritually.

John 18:15, *Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard,
16 but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the girl on duty there and brought Peter in.
17 "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" the girl at the door asked Peter. He replied, "I am not."
25 As Simon Peter stood warming himself, he was asked, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" He **denied** it, saying, "I am not."
26 One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the olive grove?"
27 Again Peter **denied** it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.*
5. God cares deeply about our relationships with his creatures. So much so that God says it is logically impossible to say that you love God and hate your brother. And not just hate, but also neglect or ignore. Sin in James is more than the bad things we do—it is the good things undone [**James 4:17**, *Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*].
 - Here just before his own monumental suffering, Jesus is teaching his disciples to love each other. **Verses 34-35**: Love each other. It is the birthmark of the Christian!!!

It is the hungry people we see but don't feed. It is the lonely people we see but do not speak to.
6. We sin against people just by being judgmental toward them. Our judgment of others ends up creating condemnation for ourselves. When we assault others and we end up getting hurt ourselves, there is a name for that. It is called being *Hoist with his own petard*. Here's what that means. Gunpowder was introduced to Europe but nobody had invented cannons yet. When they fought against a walled city, a siege was still the method of choice. But gunpowder brought an innovation. The wooden gates were the weakest part of a city's defenses. So the attackers would tie a big metal pot onto the end of a log, fill the pot, open faced, with gunpowder, and some brave soldiers would walk it up and hold it against the castle gates. When the gunpowder exploded, one of two things

would happen: 1) the gates would be penetrated by the explosion, or 2) if the gates were stout, the log and the guys holding it would be blown backwards. That led to the expression, *Hoist with his own petard*. You attack someone else, and you get blown away yourself. (Rex Downie, "Hoist With Their Own Petard," *World*, January 27, 1990, 21)

B. Sins Against God

INSERT COURTROOM CARTOON: Judge to defendant: *The jury has found you guilty, but if it's any consolation, you sure had me fooled.*"

1. Of course Peter's threefold denial was a sin against God. It had huge moral implications. Peter broke his promise to Jesus. I mean, this is lying to God face to face. He didn't mean to lie—I believe he really meant it when he pronounced his loyalty to Jesus. But he let him down big-time. From a human heart perceptive, think how you would feel if you were in the clutches of evil men, facing torture and execution, while your friends on the edge of the room protest their complete ignorance of you.
 - Don't get me wrong. Jesus wasn't whimpering and waiting helplessly to be rescued. He had already deflected Peter's sword attempt and explained that he had legions of angels at his beck and call.
 - **Matthew 26:52**, *"Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?"*
 2. I have long pondered what David meant in his psalmic confession of his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah. This was adultery and murder. This was a serious sin against people and an unconscionable abuse of power. But when he confessed, he said to God: **Psalm 51:4**, *Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.* Was he totally insensitive to all the people he had hurt? No, I don't think so—what I think this means is that David realized something that maybe most of us don't see so clearly. David says that when we sin, we hurt God **more** than we hurt others, more than we hurt ourselves. The enormity of sin against God in a sense eclipses the sin we commit against other people. They are both bad, really bad, but the sin against God is **comparatively huge**.
 3. I do not believe one sinner can wound another sinner as much as a sinner can wound the heart of Holy God.
 4. Now you may feel like you're a pretty good person, and I wouldn't try to tell you that you aren't. Compared to other people, you may well be in top 5% of good, kind, moral people. But that's the catch—compared to **other people**.
- RAVI STORY ABOUT TWO BROTHERS**
5. Where do we stand on God's scale?
 - Romans 3:23, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*
 - Romans 6:23, *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*
 6. WOW, we are in big trouble! We sin against people—we sin against God. We all have a worst case scenario story of sin in our lives. We all have at least one scandalous secret we never divulge—not even to our closest friends.

SO.....

II. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF NOW?

A. Resented?

1. If I had been Peter, I would have felt that Jesus hated my guts. I would feel that any relationship I had ever had with Jesus was irreparably damaged.
2. Jesus has just been trying to tell them about his self-sacrifice on the Cross. In verse 31, Jesus says it's a bout glory to God and glory to Jesus. The HINGE OF ALL HISTORY is about to turn. Like Rick Warren says, *It's not about me!*

It's all about Jesus. But as soon as the chips were down, it was all about Peter. He failed his Lord. He wasn't about glorifying Jesus. He was about saving Peter's skin.

3. Look what happens when a man betrays his wife's trust. She will feel resentment. He will appropriately prepare himself for her wounded wrath.
 - Cf. the story of the woman who ran over her philandering husband in a parking lot. She backed up, I think, and ran over him a second time just to make sure.
4. Remember what the angel at the empty tomb said when he appeared to the women? He said, *go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'* **Mark 16:7**
 - What a welcome message that would have been for Peter. How forgiving and thoughtful of Jesus to especially utter his name. Peter needed extra assurance. If Jesus had not said this, I doubt that Peter would have showed up at any of the places Jesus was after the resurrection. He would not have had the courage to face the anticipated and understandable resentment of Jesus.
5. **Luis Palau**, *God is not disillusioned with us. He never had any illusions to begin with.* (*Luis Palau Responds E-zine*, Jan. 1, 2000)
 - **Psalm 103:14, He remembers that we are dust**
6. Martin Luther used an expression: *simultaneously saint and sinner*. One of the dominant themes of I John is *walking in the light*. John says that if you are truly a child of God, you DO walk in the light. But he also deals with the fact that we are frail and so he urges us that we SHOULD walk in the light. By the grace and power of God we ARE light-walkers. But because we are also dust, we are SOEMTIMES night-walkers. That's why John starts his little book with a spiritual first-aid kit: **I John 1:9**, *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.*
7. When John Wesley put out a hymnal, he included a section of songs under the heading: *Hymns Upon Falling into Sin*. The songs had lyrics to help Christians acknowledge and deal with their sin. Then, appropriately, he had a section called, *Hymns Upon Recovering from a Fall*. (Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, Frances Asbury Press, Nappanee, IN, 1997, 103)
8. Do you feel that God resents you for your sin? That's a natural human conclusion. But it is not a heavenly conclusion. God declares that he loves sinners and he removes our sin. Far from resenting us, he reaches out to us with a heart of reconciliation.

THEOLOGICAL VOCABULARY REVIEW:
RECONCILIATION—God brings estranged sinners back to himself by solving the broken relationship.
PROPITIATION—God satisfies his just and righteous wrath against sinners.
ATONEMENT—God covers our sin.
JUSTIFICATION—God awards to us the righteous merits of Jesus Christ. He treats us as if we were as good and holy as His own Son.
9. **Habakkuk 3:2, in wrath remember mercy.**
 - God DID this
 - God STILL does this...

- B. Sidelined?
INSERT CHEETAH CARTOON HERE: *My name's Harold. Well, I've known about it for years, but never talked about it....I think I'm hittin' 50 mph...Tops.*

Welcome to the fellowship of clay feet. Do you ever wonder at the fact that God uses such defective servants as we are?

1. Paul worried about this. I Corinthians 9:27, *No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.*
 - Not about getting into heaven...
 - But about being valuable to Jesus in doing his work in the world
2. Peter worried about this, too. That's why Jesus took extra time with him.
 - Jesus gave Peter the reassurance of a prophetic word. **Luke 22:31**, "*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*"
 - Jesus gave Peter the reassurance of a recommissioning word, John 21: *Feed my sheep.*
3. *People come up and say to me, "Pastor, will you forgive me for what I did?" I say, "Of course I will forgive you, but I don't trust you." I want to see them walking a different path for awhile. I want to see their lives change. Until then they're forgiven; I'm just not going to make myself vulnerable to them again.* (Ken Hutcherson, *Before All Hell Breaks Loose*, Multnomah Publishers, Sisters, OR, 2001, 120)
4. I get this issue presented to me this way. A broken husband comes to me and says that his wife has just moved out/kicked him out. He just got a whack on the side of the head that he has hurt this woman more than he ever realized before and he desperately wants her back. He knows he needs to change. How can he get the girl back? How long will it take? What does he have to do to prove to her that he has really changed and the past will not keep repeating itself?
 - *I don't know.* Because she can't see into the depths of his heart. It may take 6 months—it may take 6 years. She needs to see him prove himself over a significant period of time before she will ever trust him again.
5. That's a necessary human perspective. But God looks on the heart. In normal human relationships, if the other disciples could have placed Peter on year's of probation to prove that he really was repentant and could really be depended on. But God looks deeply into the human heart. He doesn't need probationary periods. He knows the real you and me. The only thing that can sideline us in God's eyes is only sin and rebellion against His will.

III. HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE FORGIVENESS OF GOD?

A. How Forgiveness Works

1. On what basis can God forgive sin? (There's no cheap and easy forgiveness with God—He is too righteous to just sweep our sin under the carpet. The universe would cry out at the injustice. No, God's forgiveness is incredibly expensive. It cost big-time.)
 - Cowper's hymn:
*There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains...*
 - That may be overly vivid for you—but it certainly gets the point across.
 - Isaiah 53...*All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*
 - **II Corinthians 5:21**, *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
2. How thorough is forgiveness?
 - Is it as if I had never sinned? I.e., JUSTIFICATION. God doesn't rewrite history, like turning the tape back and re-recording our life. What's done is

done. But we get into heaven just as slick as the greatest faith heroes of the Bible.

- *Hello, Abraham!*
- *Good morning, Paul! Nice day in Paradise, isn't it?!*
- *Good to see you here, Mary!*
- Are all consequences obliterated? Not necessarily. Nathan told David that God had taken away his sin and he wouldn't die. But the child would die, and the sword would never depart from his household. There then followed the rape of Tamar, the murder of Amnon, the treachery and death of Absalom.
- Does God have amnesia?
 - **Hebrews 10:17**, *Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."*
 - **Psalm 103:12**, *as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us*
 - God has a very good mind. He doesn't forget anything. But he chooses to not take our sins into account.
 - **Psalm 103:10**, *he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.*

B. How Forgiveness Is Accessed

1. Does God forgive all sins?
 - Not automatically!!! You have to **recognize** that you need to be forgiven (not everyone does—these are the most perilous people of all)
 - Sociologist Ashley Montagu, *My known interpretation of the evidence leads me to the conclusion that man is born good and is organized in such a manner from birth as to need to grow and develop his potentialities for goodness....All the available evidence gathered by competent investigators indicates that man is born without a trace of aggressiveness.* (quoted in Larry Crabb, *The Safest Place on Earth*, Word, Nashville, 1999, 50)
 - Voltaire wrote a character in one of his plays who died muttering, *God will forgive—that's his job.*
2. Are there any pre-requisites to getting divine forgiveness?
 - Admission
 - **D. L. Moody**: *I've had more trouble with D. L. Moody than any other man I've ever known.*
 - Malcolm Muggeridge once said that the depravity of man is the most empirically verifiable fact but also the most resisted by the human mind. (Ravi Zacharias, *Cries of the Heart*, Word, Nashville, 1998, 112)
 - How about dialing heaven?! When Merilee takes a heart-pain call at the Everett Clinic, one of the most frustrating things she deals with is people not wanting to hang up and call 911. People don't want to admit that they are really having a problem.
 - Hey, I'm used to that. It happens at church all the time!
3. What if you do it again? Remember, it was God who invented the formula of 70 times 7!!!
4. What if you **plan** to do it again?
 - **Galatians 6:7**, *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.*
 - *We must arrange life so that sin no longer looks good to us.* (John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1997, 70)

C. How Forgiveness Feels

1. Restoration of broken relationships:
 - *Ernest Hemingway once told a story to illustrate the popularity of the Spanish name Paco. A father, he said, journeyed to Madrid to put an ad in*

*the local paper: PACO MEET ME AT HOTEL MONTANA NOON WEDNESDAY ALL IS FORGIVEN PAPA. The next day the authorities had to muster a squadron of the Guardia Civil to disperse the mob of 800 young men who massed on the street in front of the inn. (Donald W. McCullough, *The Trivialization of God*, NavPress, 1995, 100)*

- **INSERT CALVIN AND HOBBS CARTOON HERE: OK, IT DOES NEED TO BE SINCERE!!! But when it is....**
- 2. Just think of what forgiveness fixes:
 - Old Testament words for sin [8 terms]
 - Chata (522)—missing the mark and hitting the wrong mark
 - Ra (444)—something morally wrong and hurtful, destructive
 - Pasha—rebellion
 - Awon—iniquity and guilt
 - Shagag—to go astray
 - Aasham—guilty
 - Rasha—wickedness
 - Tash—deliberate going astray
 - New Testament words for sin [12 terms]
 - Kakos—moral badness
 - Paneros—moral evil
 - Asebes—godlessness
 - Enochos—guilty
 - Hamartia—missing the mark and hitting the wrong mark
 - Adikia—any unrighteous conduct
 - Anomos—lawlessness
 - Parabates—transgression
 - Agnoein—ignorant worship of the wrong god
 - Planao—to go astray in a culpable sense
 - Praptoma—deliberate falling away
 - Hypocrisy—deceiving yourself and others
- 4. Every once in a while I figure out or fear that I am in the doghouse with someone. That feels terrible. It kills relational freedom. You know how it is—
 - If you see them walking into a grocery store, you pull away and go to another store.
 - If they go the first service at church, you start going to the third service.
 - If there is some reason you need to call them, you procrastinate it.
- 5. Doesn't it feel good when the problem is worked out? Isn't it just terrific when you are back on comfortable speaking terms and the elephant is out of the room?!

CONCLUSION:

- A. King Ahab, the 8th of the 20 Kings of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He was one of the worst of them all. **I Kings 16:30**, *Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him.*
 - 31 He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him.*
 - 32 He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria.*
 - 33 Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than did all the kings of Israel before him.*
- B. Elijah catches up with him as he goes to take possession of the vineyard, and announces God's judgment on him.
- C. But then, mercy breaks out...
 - I Kings 22:27-28, When Ahab heard these words, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and fasted. He lay in sackcloth and went around meekly.*
 - 28 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah the Tishbite:*

29 "Have you noticed how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has humbled himself, I will not bring this disaster in his day, but I will bring it on his house in the days of his son."

Timothy G. Walton
Snohomish Community Church
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